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ABSTRACT

The importance of the prosodic features of the phonological component of language in converting underlying grammatical structure into patterns of sound is discussed. Examples are given of data equating prosodic features of English pronunciation with required lexico-syntactic changes in Spanish in order to delineate possible areas of first language interference for Spanish speakers learning English as a second language. It is shown that what is stated at the levels of lexicon or syntax in Spanish can often be expressed only at the phonological level in English. Language instructors should be aware of sounds in one language which are totally lacking in the sound system of another, sounds which are phonemically distinct in one language but mere phonetic variants in another, and sounds which occur in both languages but whose pattern of occurrence is different in each language. The teaching of pronunciation must be a continuous activity in which substantial attention is paid to the prosodics of phonology. (RW)

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ENGLISH PROSODICS: A CONTRASTIVE APPROACH

Seymour Pollock

A review of the major divisions of contemporary linguistic research will reflect a design of language as having separate phonological, syntactic, and semantic components. Because the physical aspects of language, i.e., sounds, are accessible to study by instruments, it is widely believed that the phonological component has been the most thoroughly researched. However, an overview of the literature reveals that it has been the general sound characterization of pronunciation which has been exhaustively studied, i.e., phonemics (both autonomous and systematic), rather than the prosodics of pronunciation. [1] It is my contention that the prosodic features of the phonolgical component are as important as the rules of phonetic characterization for converting underlying grammatical structure into patterns of sound. Since I do not intend this to be a theoretical paper but am concerned rather with the relevance and utility of this observation in the teaching of English to Spanish speakers, I shall illustrate the linguistic justification for my assertion by presenting selective data equating prosodic features of English pronunciation with required lexico-syntactic changes in Spanish. If the hypothesis of applied contrastive linguistics is that "wherever there are similarities, learning can be facilitated, and wherever there are contrasts, learning may be retarded or interfered with" (Carroll, 1968:144), the purpose of such data is to delineate and thereby help diminish possible areas of L1 interference for Spanish speakers studying ESL.

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In the English sentence: How do you go from here to the University, English speakers will immediately recognize that (1) How do [you] go from here to the University is related to a different semantic field from (2) How do you go from [here] to the University.

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[1] In the American tradition of phonological analysis, such features as pitch, stress, and juncture have been called suprasegmentals, while in the European schools, they are often referred to as prosodics. In this paper, the latter term will be used throughout.

In (1), stressed you refers to a specific person, the addressee, and fits the traditional catergory of a second person pronoun. In (2), although still catergorized by traditional grammarians as a second person pronoun despite its deep structure in the sentence, unstressed you is generated through use of a restricted linguistic code and functions as an impersonal NP. It represents a differentiated alternative for the form one which would have been induced had an elaborated rather than a restricted code been used (see Bernstein, 1975).[2] In English the lexical ambiguity contained in (1) and (2) is resolved solely at the level of phonology. In Spanish no such ambiguity occurs since the semantic range between sentences (1) and (2) can only be expressed lexico-syntactically: (1') ¿Cómo va usted de aquí a la universidad? and (2')¿Cómo se va de aquí a la universidad? It is obvious that in the absence of prosodic equivalence between the two languages English phonology, in this instance, is lexico-syntactic for the Spanish speaker.

Consider the following example: (1) Se tiene que estudiar para aprender; (2) Hay que estudiar para aprender; and (3) Usted tiene que estudiar para aprender. The semantic range distinguished between (1) and (2) finds no equivalence in English. Both would be expressed in English (if generated through a restrictive rather than an elaborated code) as: (1') You have to study to learn. In (3), however, what is expressed as syntactically different from (1) and (2) is conveyed in English solely through a change in stress pattern from (1') to: You have to study to learn.

In a discussion of distinctions within and between primitive languages, J.S. Bruner in an appendix to A Study of Thinking (1957) considers that a range of experience may be differentiated in the lexicon of one language and undifferentiated in another. Although the context of the statements is different from the present, the force of the comment is believed to hold here. The single English lexical form

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[2]The code-switch perceived in English through use of one or unstressed you has no equivalence in Spanish.

some is differentiated in Spanish through use of the forms unos and algunos: (1) Tengo unos libros; (2) Tengo algunos libros. On the surface, it would seem the semantic features which have generated these two lexical forms in Spanish are lacking in English since there is only the one form some. On closer examination, however, one finds that the semantic range apparent between the two Spanish lexical forms is communicated in English at the level of stress: (1') I have some books and (2') I have some books. In (1'), unstressed some is the semantic equivalent for the Spanish form unos of (1). In both (1') and (1) the possession to books and not their quantity is viewed as being the semantically more important item. In (2), on the other hand, the semantic field perceived through the form algunos finds its equivlent in the use of stressed some in (2'). In these two sentences, the speaker views the quantity of books as being more semantically important than the possession of books (although stated less precisely than by supplying a definite number). In both English and Spanish, stressed or unstressed some in one or the use of unos or algunos in the other refects an attitude on the part of the speaker. Whereas in Spanish this attitude finds expression at the level of lexicon, in English it is at the level of phonology.

The lack of ambiguity in the following Spanish phrases would have no counterpart in English were it not for prosodic input: (1) un libro español and (2) un libro de espanñol. Syntactically the two phrases reflect two different semantic relationships. In (1), the origin of the book is denoted and in (2), the subject matter of the book is underscored. This distinction in Spanish can be made only at the level of phonology in English: (1') a Spanish book and (2') a Spanish book.

A classic example of English prosodics is the sentence: Visiting relatives bored me. Nonexistent in Spanish at the phonological level are its two semantically viable interpretations: (1) Visiting relatives bored me and (2) Visiting relatives bored me. Since the use of a present participle with a noun is mutually exclusive in Spanish as is its use as an NP (the infinitive is the nominal form of the verb in Spanish) the English prosodics can only be expressed in Spanish at the level of syntax: (1') Unos parientes que estuvieron de visita me aburrieron and (2') Visitar a los parientes me aburrió.

The importance of prosodics in English as a lexico-signaling device cannot be overstated. Consider the combination of the English forms yellow and jacket. In English it is only a matter of stress that alters the entire semantic range of this combination: (1) a ⌈yellow jacket, and (2) a yellow⌋ jacket. In Spanish, on the other hand, the English shift in stress finds its equivalency in the generation of completely different lexical forms: (1) una avispa and (2) una chaqueta amarilla. By extension, such English combinations of black and berry, hot and dog, black and board would find their Spanish equivalents, not at the level of phonology as in English, but at the level of lexicon.

It is also through stress that the possible syntactic category of a lexical item is often indicated in English. Consider such forms as object⌉ and ⌈object; permit⌉ and ⌈permit; suspect⌉ and ⌈suspect. In Spanish, the semantic component embedded in the English forms would be expressed at the level of lexicon: oponerse and objeto; permitir and permiso; sospechar and sospechado.

Closely related in English to pitch and stress as semantic-signaling devices is juncture. In the example night rate, a pause between the /t/ and the /r/ produces a distinct lexical form in Spanish from a pause before the /t/. Any lexical ambiguity as might result through a misplacement of juncture in English cannot occur in Spanish since the semantic designation of each generates its own lexical forms: tarifa de noche and nitrato. In such sentences as It swings; They needed rain; or See Mabel, any change in meaning signaled by a change in juncture would be expressed in all cases at the level of lexicon in Spanish.

In English, the conversion of an assertion into an affirmation is accomplished solely through stress with the one exception (excluding the verb to be) that do is inserted if the auxiliary consists only of tense: (1) I work there and (2) I do work there. In all other instances it is stress alone that is responsible for semantic shift: (3) I can⌈do⌉that and (3') I⌈can⌉do that: (4) I have⌈seen⌉that and (4') I ⌈have⌉seen that. In Spanish, by contrast, this semantic transformation is possible only at the lexico-syntactic level through the insertion of sí before the Verb Phrase: (5) Yo puedo hacer eso and (5') Yo sí puedo hacer eso; (6) Yo he visto eso and (6')

Yo sí he visto eso.

The lexico-semantic differentiation in the Spanish sentences: (1) No admiten a ningún estudiante and (2) No admiten a cualquier estudiante is arrived at in English through phonology: (1) They don't admit any/student and (2) They don't admit /any student. Counter to Spanish, it is the stress patterns in these two English sentences that correspond to the semantic range generated through the forms ningún (any whatsoever) and cualquier (just any) and not lexical equivalence between the languages.

Another lack of level-to-level prosodic correspondence between Spanish and English is in the expression of conjecture, or of possibility, in which implicit confidence is not placed. For example, the English sentence: John must be home contains two semantic fields depending upon intonation: (1) John/must be home and (2) John must be/home. In (1) it is John's obligation to be home and in (2) it is assumed that John is already at home but one is not certain. The semantic designations embedded in (1) and (2) as a result of prosodics are conveyed in Spanish at the lexico-syntactic level: (1') Juan tiene que estar en casa and (2') Juan estará en casa.

Let us now consider the following sentences in Spanish: (1) ¿Está usted seguro de que ha sido él? and (2) ¿Está usted seguro de que haya sido él, In (1), the speaker is genuinely seeking information. In (2). on the other hand, the speaker's subjective attitude concerning the information being sought is made manifest at the same time he seems to be requesting it. Through the transformation in the Verb Phrase from ha sido to haya sido the speaker projects his own doubt concerning the action of the person about whom he is inquiring. In English, by contrast, this would be accomplished not through lexico-syntactic transformations, but at the level of phonology: (1) Are you sure it was/he? and (2)/Are you sure/it was he?

In the English sentence: John had conferred upon him a great honor, prosodics make a meaningful distinction on the word had: (1) John had conferred/upon him a great honor; (2) John/had/conferred/upon him a great honor; and (3) John/had/conferred upon him a great honor. The meaning of (1) is that John had conferred the

honor on somebody else. In (2) John received the honor. In (3) John already was in possession of the honor, which had been previously conferred upon him. These semantic changes due to changes in pitch find their equivalents in Spanish only at the level of syntax: (1') Juan le había conferido un gran honor; (2') A Juan le confirieron un gran honor; and (3') A Juan le habían conferido un gran honor.

The data presented in this paper suggest the importance for ESL/EFL teachers to consider those aspects of L1 and L2 which are expressed through different components in one or the other language. As has been demonstrated, what is often stated at the levels of lexicon and or syntax in Spanish can be expressed only at the level of phonology in English. L2 teachers have been made aware of the sounds in one language which are totally lacking in the sound system of another language. They have also become aware of sounds which are phonemically distinct in one language but are mere phonetic variants in another language. And they have learned to pay special attention to sounds which occur in both languages but whose distribution, or pattern of occurrence, is different in the two languages. To all these considerations must now be added a heightened awareness of the consequence of the prosodic features of phonology, for it is precisely in this area that many lexico-syntactic elements of one language can and do find their semantic equivalents in another.

To assume that pronunciation will or can take care of itself is to assume that control of syntax and lexicon, to which phonology is inter-related, will or can take care of themselves. This rather uneasy conviction on the part of many L2 teachers is due in great measure to a lack of awareness of the true role of the phonological component in the total design of language. To relegate the teaching of pronunciation to specific lessons or time-slots is to ignore how the phonological component of language co-involves every other aspect of the L2 learning process.

The suggestion that teaching pronunciation must be a constant activity in which as much attention is paid to the prosodics of phonology as to the general sound characterization of pronunciation is apparent from the contrastive data presented in this paper. Only through such an approach to the phonological, syntactic and semantic

components of language will the L2 teacher see that what is to be found at one level of analysis in one language is not necessarily to be found at the same level in another. In the same manner that certain phonetic differences in one language become phonemic contrasts in another, so can certain prosodic elements in one language become lexico-syntactic elements in another. It is, after all, one of the premises of applied contrastive linguistics that by identifying and explanining the similarities and contrasts between the native and the target language and then explaining or otherwise presenting them to the student, L2 learning is facilitated and possible areas of L1 interference are diminished.

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